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SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: FOOD AND CLOTHING IN EASTERN IRAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

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Part One

THE EASTERN ISLAMIC LANDS, FROM IRAN TO THE FRONTIERS WITH CHINA

(*N. Kasai*)

Information regarding food and clothing can only be gleaned from sporadic mentions in the Arabic and Persian sources and, for the later period, from details gathered by European envoys and travellers like Clavijo and Marco Polo.

Food and diet

The accounts of Islamic geographers mention the existence of markets and the varied products of the cities. Khurasan, for example, is described as a region with good weather, fertile land, green plains, numerous sheep, delicious fruit, and a wide variety of foodstuffs. With its markets and bazaars of shoemakers, drapers, craftsmen and so on, Nishapur was well known as a commercial centre and had every sort of fruit, vegetable, cereal, meat and bread. Tabaran, the district's main town, was famous for its abundance of fruit and cheap food. Abiward gained recognition for its fertile soil and other blessings and Khawaran was known for its salted meat. Balkh was considered incomparable among the Persian cities: all kinds of fruit (including citrus fruit and grapes), cereals such as wheat, rice and barley, and walnuts, almonds and vegetables were grown there. Thus it was known as the granary of Khurasan and Khwarazm. Of the adjacent regions, Qumis was noted for its pomegranates, Damghan for its red apples, Sistan for its meat, fruit and saffron and Tabaristan for its various kinds of fruit, grains and cereals, its wild birds and seafood, its pickles and jams.

Khwarazm, celebrated for its hospitable people, was also noted for its cuisine. The region had an abundance of fish oil, nuts, honey, jujube, large raisins, sesame and milk products (mainly a kind of cheese called *rahbīn*), meat, frozen fish and a famous variety of watermelon, which was placed in ice-filled lead containers and exported as far as Baghdad and the caliphal court. The Khwarazmian *bāranj* melon was famous for its sweetness and

taste. As long as the caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–33) lived in Khurasan, these melons were brought to him by courier. The dried melons of Merv were also well known and were exported, as were the dried plums of Khwarazm. Transoxania was famed as the only land that never faced famine. Its cotton, wool and silk cloth, and cloaks made out of fox, sable and grey squirrel fur, were exported to other countries. The district of Bukhara was so fertile that 1 acre (0.405 ha) was able to provide the livelihood of an entire family. Much of its agriculture depended on irrigation, by means of which rice, corn and much cotton was grown. Its sister city Samarkand was rebuilt and embellished after the Mongol devastations. The Spanish envoy Clavijo, who visited it at the beginning of the fifteenth century, during the time of Timur, praised it for its green fields, wide squares and extensive markets, full of a great variety of foods, including raw and cooked meat.

Staple items in the diet of the ordinary people included bread made with kneaded flour of wheat, barley, millet, maize or rice. Some parts of Khurasan, especially Merv, were noted for their bread. In addition to bread made from wheat flour, there was a type using flour, raisins and a mixture of fruit, that was exported to other regions. The most popular bread was made from wheat, as recommended by ancient physicians; barley bread was mainly the food of the deprived, and a sign of poverty.

The most commonly eaten meat in these regions was mutton. Alone or mixed with other foods, whether fresh or salted, it could be served cooked, grilled or broiled. As eating meat was not against the law, a great variety of domestic and wild animals were raised. In Turkistan, fish was a popular dish. Khwarazm was noted for its frozen fish, called *sbargh*; Bukhara for its fresh and salted fish; Bayhaq for its plump poultry; Sarakhs for its camel meat; and Tabaristan for its numerous domestic and predatory animals and its great variety of poultry, wild birds and fish. The salted fish, *rubaytha*, was exported from Iraq to Khurasan. Many people appreciated poultry such as chicken and pigeon; the rich served broiled pheasants and partridges at their parties. Chicken was also among the medicinal foods prescribed by doctors. It was quite common to breed hens, pigeons, partridges and many other birds for their eggs and flesh.

The Turks of the Central Asian steppes ate the meat from their sheep and from the wild animals they hunted, while the Mongols ate, both cooked and raw, the meat of various domestic and wild animals, including horses, donkeys, dogs, cats, pigs, wolves, foxes, snakes and rats. Both the meat and the milk of mares were considered excellent dishes. The Mongols sometimes cut the flesh of horses and sucked their blood in an emergency. Non-Muslims killed animals by spearing their chest and shoulders. The Great Khan Ögedey's enforcement of this law was so severe that no Muslim could slaughter an animal for four successive years.

A favourite dish consumed by all classes was *harīsa*; it was prepared with fatty meat, rice, millet or husked wheat and sugar. Merv was known to have an especially good kind. Another favourite, *surkha-bā*, made with meat, crushed grain and vinegar, spread from Persia to Iraq, where it was popular and known as *sikbāj*. *Bazmāward*, another Persian dish, made with cooked meat, eggs and leeks rolled in a thin sandwich of bread, was supposedly popularized in Baghdad by the Persian Barmakids. Cheese and other milk products such as yoghurt were consumed everywhere.

Cooking flavourings and spices included pomegranate juice, sour grapes, dried lemons, lemon juice, vinegar and sour as well as sweet herbs; these were used in soups, various kinds of cooked rice and in cooked, grilled and broiled meat. Jams, pastries, candies, dates, rhubarb, pistachios, shelled almonds, walnuts, seeds and dried fruits were other items that either accompanied meals or were eaten together with dried nuts and seeds between meals. Edible earth found in Zuzan, Kuhistan and Nishapur was among the rare and valued products which were exported to distant places and offered at the courts of kings.

Drinking has a long history in Persia and many Persian, Turkish and Mongol rulers were wine-bibbers. Devout Muslims avoided drinking wine, but medical texts praised its medicinal use. The Mongol Khans were particularly addicted to drinking wine at festivals and parties. In 1241 excessive wine caused the death of Ögedey. The Il Khan Abaqa, who was mentally disturbed, also drank himself to death. During ceremonies at the court of Qubilay Khan, a large golden barrel full of wine was placed on a big chair, encircled by smaller pitchers full of mare's or camel's milk and ordinary wine. Both male and female guests drank the wine. In the homeland of the Khitay, at the time of the Mongols, a type of wine was made by fermenting rice and adding seasoning; when heated, it was particularly intoxicating. At the time of the Il Khanids, even when they became Muslims, wine was so widespread among all classes that Ghazan Khan was forced to forbid drinking in public places. He ordered, 'Whoever is found drunk in cities and bazaars must be arrested and punished.'

Fuqqā' (beer) was made from malt or dried grapes; a non-alcoholic version was prepared from sugar, honey, syrup of sugar and ice. *Nabīdh* (date wine) was made of dates or raisins and drunk by all classes in society. According to the historian Ibn Isfandiyār:

In Tabaristan there are colourful wines of yellow, white and red colours as if they were fenu-greek, ruby or rose-water. They are nutritious, useful, good-smelling and without causing any headache or troubles after intoxication.

It seems that these drinks were non-alcoholic and made of various plants and fruits of the region.

Milk, mainly from sheep, cows and camels, was the main drink not only of the nomadic peoples, but also of villagers and city-dwellers. Mongols and Turkic nomads liked mare's milk best. *Dūgh* (yoghurt diluted with water) was an everyday drink served with meals. There were various colourful dishes, fruits and drinks used to welcome guests and messengers on happy occasions and at parties. Accustomed to their own local foods or from fear of being poisoned, most of the great men took their personal cooks with them on trips and missions. The Saffarid ruler of Sistan, Ya^cqūb b. Layth, ate plain, ordinary food, mostly barley bread, leeks, onions, fish and a little rice with a sort of cream or starch jelly. In his kitchens, 20 sheep were slaughtered every day and put in 5 big copper pots to cook. Ya^cqūb himself ate from this food and divided the rest among his servants, army commanders and friends. It was he who told the envoy of the ^cAbbasid caliph that while he (Ya^cqūb) was satisfied with a piece of dried bread and a slice of onion, he would never make compromises where the caliph was concerned. ^cAmr b. Layth, Ya^cqūb's brother and successor, had so many kitchen utensils that 300 camels and horses could hardly carry them. But at the time of his captivity in the camp of Amir Ismā^cīl Sāmāni, his ration was just a daily piece of meat which a dog reputedly once snatched out of his hands.

During festivities at the court of Mas^cūd of Ghazna, a vast array of dishes was set out on tablecloths – meat from birds and wild animals, fish, pickles, jams, thin bread and wine. The great quantity of food consumed at the court of the Seljuq Sultan Sanjar in Merv required the Oghuz Turks to bring 24,000 sheep to the kitchens every year. When Ibn Battūta visited the court of the Khans of the Golden Horde in Khwarazm in the fourteenth century, the dishes were as follows: broiled chickens, crane, young pigeons, a kind of buttered bread called *kelīcha* or *kāk*, and sweet paste; there were also many kinds of fruit, such as grapes, excellent melons and pomegranates, served in silver as well as gold containers. Many of the Mongol rulers favoured horse meat, especially chopped tripe, and the whole head of a sheep. Flesh of predatory animals and birds was another dish of Mongol commanders. In the autumn of 1222, when Chinggis Khan spent the winter in Samarkand, his sons Ögedey and Chaghatay went bird-hunting near the mouth of the Zarafshan and sent 50 camel-loads of various kinds of hunted birds to him every week.

Sufi mystics avoided the usual types of food and drink, and were content with a bare minimum; they lived mainly on broad beans and bread with salt or olive oil, and, as an ascetic exercise, went for long periods without eating meat. The diet of the masses was restricted and often inadequate. Grain and cereals, such as wheat, rice, barley, vetch, lentil and beans, were cooked with the cheap meat of camels or cows and made into soup; broad beans were also common among the lower classes of society. Barley bread and millet were

the food of the poor. Dates, aubergines, onions, carrots, potatoes, green vegetables, maize and millet bread were common foods among villagers.

As to eating habits, most people would simply put out all the kinds of food together so that family and guests could eat whatever they liked; but in general, there was only one cooked dish with bread. At court or in hostelryes, however, the dishes were not all put out at once. Instead, a list of available dishes was offered and each person ordered what he wanted. Upper-class people had their own containers or bowls for eating, while the common people usually shared a bowl or tray. The 'tablecloth' was a piece of cloth or leather, or a big copper or wooden tray. The Mongol way of eating was crude. At parties and receptions everyone was given a slice of meat which was eaten without being cut – cutting meat was not allowed, even when it was offered to a guest by the host. The left-over meat was kept, inside a skin, for use at the next meal. Meal times were usually as follows: breakfast in the morning, lunch at noon and supper in the early evening, to allow the food to be digested before sleeping. People were advised to eat warm food only twice a day in order to keep fit and healthy.

Contemporary works on ethics describe the correct manners when eating. They include washing one's hands and saying *bismillāh al-hamdu lillāh* before and after every meal; stopping eating before one is stuffed; beginning and ending a meal with some salt; taking small pieces of bread from a dish, taking care to chew them well; not opening one's mouth wide; not licking one's fingers; and sipping water rather than drinking it all at once. People were expected to eat in a happy mood, to speak of topics of common interest and to talk about righteous people, rather than remaining silent. Attending parties without an invitation, going towards the table, looking at friends and at the dishes while eating, leaving the table before the dishes have been collected, and a host ending his meal before his guests, were all considered impolite. Regarding the order of courses at the end of a meal, fruit was eaten first, as physicians considered it better for the digestion, then pastries; and finally cold water was drunk.

Dress

In this region of vast lands, varied climate and diverse products and ways of living, class differences had a great effect on people's clothing. Governors, officials, soldiers, aristocrats, scholars, judges, craftsmen, farmers, and so on, each had their own dress; religious affiliation and national and ethnic differences were also a major influence on the type or style of clothing. However, because of the exiguous sources, especially about the regions with which we are concerned, a survey of dress is difficult. The works of writers such

as Dozy regarding Islamic dress are mainly concerned with clothing in the ^cAbbasid and Fatimid lands, essentially Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Africa and Spain. Nevertheless, geographers and travellers of the Eastern Islamic lands give some useful information about styles of dress in such regions as Khurasan, a flourishing centre of silk, wool and cotton textile manufacture of the time.

Nishapur was noted for its various kinds of cloth and clothing, exported to far-off regions, where kings and great men chose them for their attire. The city's products included white cloth, various kinds of turbans, scarfs, silk undershirts and other types of hair and cotton cloth which were exported as far as Iraq and Egypt. Most towns had their own specialities, such as *mulham*, the half-silk cloth of Merv. Bukhara produced various kinds of silk cloth and had famous weaving factories. Most of Bukhara's taxes were paid to Baghdad in this cloth. The types of cloth known as *Bukhārī*, which were heavy and strong, were bought by Arabs in great numbers. Carpets, rugs, silk cloth, bedding, mats and prayer rugs were exported from Bukhara to other regions, and especially to Iraq. In Khwarazm, sable and grey squirrel furs, goat skins, carpets, bed coverings, silk, silk caps and cotton robes were produced in large numbers and the surplus was exported. Samarkand was noted for its tents, silk, wool and furs; its robes were exported to Turkistan. In Tabaristan, many kinds of wool, silk, linen and cotton robes were found. Sistanis wore three or four turbans on their heads in red, yellow, green or white, mostly of silk. The people of Sogdiana wore skilfully ornamented silk waistcoats and jackets, boots, and hats with sharp brims. In the tenth century, the people on the northern frontier regions of Transoxania dressed like the neighbouring Turks.

The oldest piece of silk from this region dating back to the Islamic era, now to be found in the Louvre in Paris, belongs to the Samanid period and was woven *c.* 985 for a ruler in Khurasan. White robes and other silk articles of clothing, together with precious head coverings, were among the tribute sent from Khurasan to the court of Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809) in Baghdad. The successors of Chinggis Khan wore gold-woven robes; the Mongols' dress had previously consisted mainly of animal skins. Soon afterwards they took to a sack-like garment that was loose on the left side; the right side was tied at the shoulder (see further, Part Two below).

Il Khanid dignitaries in Persia wore furs and leather hats. Ghazan Khan gave orders for turbans to be worn, on religious grounds, but was unsuccessful in enforcing this measure. Mongol women wore long trousers under their sack-like garments and tall, basket-like hats covered with a piece of cloth. In an attempt to curb the nobles' luxurious lifestyle, the Il Khan Gaykhatu forbade the wearing of gold-woven garments. Nevertheless, dignitaries wore new robes at parties and festivities. The furs of sables, grey squirrels, ermines and

other animals were essential materials for the garments of the Mongols and the Turks of the steppes. At his birthday festivities, the Great Khan Qubilay donned gold-woven garments; 20,000 of his courtiers attended the ceremony, wearing golden and brightly coloured garments made of costly silk ornamented with pearls and gold. Timur, however, wore a plain silk robe and a long white hat with a Badakhshan ruby on its top, surrounded by precious pearls and jewels.

During the ninth century, great merchants wore the *taylasān* (a head-shawl whose end did not fall below the chin). The lower classes, however, did not wear this garment. Cooks wore garments resembling boiler-suits, servants carried napkins and towels, water-carriers wore short trousers, meat-roasters wore a loincloth or napkin, while traders and artisans wore loose-fitting garments and farmers wore thick cotton dresses and colourful turbans. *Muhtasibs* (municipal inspectors) watched over the type and the state of cleanliness of craftsmen's dress.

The choice of colours for flags, government dress and badges usually had political significance. Thus the caliph al-Ma'mūn changed the traditional black of the 'Abbasids to the green of the 'Alids when he chose 'Alī al-Ridā as his heir, but later returned to the 'Abbasid black. In these as in other parts of the Islamic world, black garments were traditionally used for mourning ceremonies, but in some quarters white was the symbol of mourning. When mourning the death of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qādir (991–1031), Mas'ūd of Ghazna wore a white robe and turban and all the court retainers and chamberlains also attended in white dress.

Part Two

MONGOLIA

(*S. Natsagdorj*)

Shelter, crafts and dress

The Mongols' nomadic existence necessitated dwellings that could easily be dismantled. The yurt, a felt-covered framed structure, fulfilled these needs. John of Plano Carpini, who

travelled through the region in the mid-thirteenth century, describes the Mongol yurts as follows:

Their shelters are round, shaped like tents and made of twigs and thin sticks; at the top in the centre is a circular window that admits light and lets out the smoke, for there is always a fire in the middle. The walls and roofs are covered with felt, and the doors are also made of felt. Some of the shelters are large; others are small, according to the people's wealth or poverty.

Certain yurts, permanently mounted on wagons and unable to be dismantled like the normal kind, were called *ger-tereg*, or 'wagon-yurt'. The yurts varied in size: whereas just 1 ox was needed to transport a small yurt, 3 or more were required for a large one. Khans and *noyans* (chiefs) had special wagon-yurts (*ord-ger tereg* = 'palace wagon-yurt'); measuring up to 9 m in width, they were drawn by 22 oxen.

In addition to the yurt, conventional dwellings and public buildings (temples, monasteries, etc.) had been known to the population of Mongolia for some time. These structures were built of a variety of materials. In the wooded areas of northern Mongolia, for example, timber was used, evidence of which is provided by the remains of beams found in the Kitan settlement in Khentei. In steppe areas, there were frame-and-post structures with various types of filling, structures of sun-dried brick with foundations and occasionally walls of stonework. In settlements dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries or earlier, we find the remains of buildings where a large, flat, fired grey brick was used in the construction of extensions. Grey, flat, broad brick has been found in the Kitan settlements of Mongolia (tenth and eleventh centuries).

Crafts played a significant part in the economy and culture of the Mongolian nation. There were several stages in the development of Mongolian crafts; and in the course of these, Mongolian craftsmen assimilated new methods and a certain amount of specialization thus took place. Workmen who fashioned a variety of objects from wood and iron were called *darhan*. According to the references in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, the *darhans* were divided into *tergech*, craftsmen specializing in the construction of wagons, and *modoch*, who specialized in woodwork. *Huyagiin darhuul*, who specialized in the manufacture of weapons for the Khans, resided permanently at their courts.

The abundant metal deposits in the Mongol lands encouraged the development of a knowledge of the physical properties of ores and metals and the skill of processing them for specific purposes, attested by literary and archaeological finds. The results of the excavations at Karakorum and other Mongol settlements confirm the existence of specifically Mongol crafts and trades, including the casting of iron and bronze; other workshops were principally concerned with the production of various types of weaponry. The stamped bronzeware, silverware, ornaments from horses' harnesses and bronze mirrors found at

Karakorum testify to the skill of the Mongol smiths, metalworkers and jewellers. The high level of metal production there is confirmed by the technical analysis of some of the articles found; analysis of samples of white cast iron and steel shows that the white iron melted at a temperature of 1350 °. Experts believe that it would have been impossible to achieve this temperature by hand-operated bellows; a motor force would have been necessary, and was probably provided by water power reaching Karakorum from the Orkhon river.

In terms of their development, Mongol crafts and trades may largely be described as a dependent sector of the Mongols' economic activity, on the level of cottage industry. Given their economic system, the herders generally only made products and household items to meet the vital requirements of their nomadic life. The various products obtained from the livestock long remained the principal raw material for the craft industries. Sheep's wool was used to manufacture felt; belts, harnesses, various types of vessels, clothing, headgear and footwear were made from the skins of domesticated livestock.

The making of clothing required particular skills, such as the ability to process the hides and manufacture thread and a knowledge of stitching techniques. The Mongols' main item of clothing was the *deli*, a robe with seamless shoulders. Mongolian *delis* of the tenth to the thirteenth century were very different from the modern versions. Collarless and open from top to bottom, they wrapped over at breast level and fastened with three clasps on the right and a single clasp on the left, where they were slit as far up as the sleeve. Married women wore a kind of kaftan (*nemreg*) that was extremely wide and slit in front down to the ground; they also wore a headdress known as a *bogtog*. Mongols in the thirteenth century, as now, wore a soft material belt wrapped tightly around the waist. A belt of this sort served as a kind of unstiffened corset, to make long journeys on the hard Mongol saddles more bearable and to help riders maintain their posture.

Differences in the finish, style and quality of materials were apparent in the clothing of the rich and the poor. Rich people wore clothes made of silk and wool and expensive furs brought from various foreign countries. They lined their robes with silk floss, which is extremely soft, light and warm. The poor made their heavy outer coats from dog or goat skins, lining their clothing with linen or cotton. They used felt to make cloaks, saddle-cloths and rain hats.

The footwear of the Mongol peoples had a number of characteristic features; the cut and assembly were common to all groups. Mongol boots (tenth to the eleventh century) had tops which enclosed the entire shin and were the same width at top and bottom. The sole was thick and inflexible with felt padding. The rigid toe was turned upwards. This boot was designed specifically for standing in stirrups and riding in a hard saddle at a quick gallop.

Thus the Mongols' traditional clothing was influenced by the nomadic population's adaptation to the natural environment. It fulfilled its principal utilitarian function; it was simple, and it provided excellent protection from the sharp variations in temperature, from the wind and from the large number of insects which were always present around the livestock as they grazed.

Food and diet

The basis of the Mongols' diet consisted of milk and meat, but the milk products were varied in composition and mode of preparation. The milk of all sorts of livestock – cows, sheep, goats, camels, mares – was used. All types, apart from mare's milk, were boiled in a cauldron before use. The unboiled mare's milk was turned into koumiss (*airak*), a fermented, foaming drink, made by whisking the milk for a long period. The various products obtained from the boiled milk were either consumed fresh or conserved and stored for the winter. Fresh milk products included *taraq* (soured milk), *byashlaq*, a type of cheese made from unsalted curds, and *örume*, a thick cream cheese formed by boiling milk for a long time in a cauldron over a slow fire. Conserved milk products included *aaruul* (dried curds); when dried in the form of little balls, it was called *grut*, which was firmer than *aaruul* and could be kept for a long time. *Aaruul* and *grut* had the same importance in the life of the Mongol population as bread has in the lives of farming peoples.

Meat was mainly consumed in winter. The livestock raised by the Mongol peoples may be divided into two categories: 'livestock with hot breath', i.e. horses and sheep; and 'livestock with cold breath', i.e. cattle, goats and camels. Meat from all types of domestic livestock formed part of the diet. In summer and autumn, game such as antelope, Mongolian gazelle and Siberian marmot was added. The Mongols preserved meat by drying it; the dried meat was known as *borts*. Summer *borts* differed from winter *borts* in that it dried more quickly and turned dark in the sun. Winter sun-dried *borts* became lighter in the sun and was more highly valued. *Borts* was made from all types of meat. According to *The Secret History of the Mongols*, an ancestor of the Mongols named Bodonchar prepared *borts* from the flesh of wild duck, which he hung on trees. In winter, meat was not only dried but also frozen. The chilled carcasses were jointed, wrapped in a skin and placed in a cart, where they were kept throughout the winter. The fresh meat of cattle and other livestock was boiled for consumption, whereas game was usually roasted. The practice of cooking the meat of hunted animals goes back, of course, to antiquity. Among the Mongols, the earliest known techniques of food preparation, i.e. roasting over a fire or using red hot stones, were still in use in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Various seasonings were

used in their food: wild onions, wild roots and grasses, caraway seeds, rhubarb and *sarana*. Although the Mongols' diet also included farinaceous foods, these were not as varied as those found in the diet of settled agricultural peoples.

The nomads' livestock-breeding activities shaped their spiritual life and their ethics. The various genres of popular oral works formed a major element in the culture of the Mongolian peoples, reflecting the characteristics of the surrounding landscape, economic activity and mores of these nomadic herders. Thus Mongolian folklore was deeply rooted in the life of these pastoral people of the steppes.